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JPRS: 3931

20 September 1960

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STANDING COMMITTEE FOR GEOGRAPHIC NAME ORTHOGRAPHY

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

by E. Meynen

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205 EAST 42nd STREET, SUITE 300
NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

FOREWORD

This publication was prepared under contract by the UNITED STATES JOINT PUBLICATIONS RESEARCH SERVICE, a federal government organization established to service the translation and research needs of the various government departments.

JPRS: 3931

CSO: 4266-D

STANDING COMMITTEE FOR GEOGRAPHIC NAME ORTHOGRAPHY

- FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY -

[Following is a translation of an article, which is a review of the activities of the working-group nomenclature and orthography of the German Cartographic Society, by E. Meynen in the German-language periodical Kartographische Nachrichten (Cartographic News), Bielefeld, Vol. 10, No. 1, January 1960, pp 23-25.]

The need for a working-group for orthography of the German Cartographic Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Kartographie, DGfK) was established at the second annual meeting of the society in Hamburg in connection with the policy stated by the Federal Ministries 7 July 1952. This policy concerning the correct spelling of place names and areas in German texts and maps had been drafted by Prof. Dr. Stock and Cartographic Engineer Zippel. The assembly requested Prof. Dr. Meynen to take over the chairmanship of the working-group. The original members of the group were: Director Dehmelt, Superior Government Counselor (Oberreg.-Rat) Hoffmann, Director of Government Survey Dr. Kost, Prof. Dr. Schlenger, Government Counselor Prof. Dr. Stocks, and Cartographic Engineer Zippel. These were soon joined by Superior Educ. Counselor (Ob.-Stud.-Rat) Dr. Eggers, Legation Counselor Dr. Gruessner, and the President of the Society, Dr. Mair. At the fourth annual meeting in Berlin in 1954 the working-group developed a definite program of establishing aids to cartography by publishing lists of names. This work, which took the committee 16 meetings to do, as later extended to become the project of a "Geography-Duden" [Trans. note: "Duden" is an encyclopedia or lexicon system].

The work of the working-group received substantial support by the Society's Director as well as by the Federal Institute for Area Studies (Bundesanstalt fuer Landeskunde) which took over the preparatory and secretarial duties. In the summer of 1956 the working-group believed itself very near its goal to present lists of place names with both the German and the official spelling. At that time, the meeting of 6 July 1956, Legation Counselor Dr. Gruessner reported on his visit in London to the Permanent Committee on Geographic Names for British Official Use. On the basis of this report the working-group agreed unanimously that such an authoritative institution should also be established in Germany. Following this, the President of the German Cartographic Society, on 29 July 1956, requested that the Federal Government establish a standing committee of geographic names. This was submitted together with the memorandum in which he personally had set forth the reasons for the request.

At the same time when this request was submitted to the government, the chairman of the working-group established a close liaison with the editors of "Duden" which, beginning February 1957, resulted in close collaboration. Negotiations with the Geographical Institute, now in Mannheim, the publishing house of "Duden," resulted in a commitment to create, besides the volume "Duden, Rechtschreibung" (Duden Orthography) another one, a "Geographie-Duden, Rechtschreibung geographischer Namen" (Geography Duden, Geographic Name Orthography). By this agreement the working-group took upon itself a great responsibility towards the German public. This decision also caused a considerable increase in, and slow-down of, the work because, from now on, in addition to the spelling, also the accentuation, the pronunciation, and the geographic coordinates had to be added to each name.

The initiative of the German Cartographic Society and its suggestion concerning an enlarged Standing Committee for Geographic Name Orthography met with the approval of the Federal Government after several discussions between the president of the society and the chairman of the working-group with the officials in charge of the matter. This approval was given by a letter of the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministerium) dated January 13, 1959. In addition to the members of the working-group already mentioned (since joined by the chief editor of "Duden," Dr. Grebe, and by Dr. Koetter, Lt. Col. Engineer Mueller, and Ministerial Counselor in retirement, Dr. Siewke as new president replacing the deceased president, Mair), Prof. Dr. Lautensach was also invited as representative of the Central Association of German Geographers (Zentralverband der deutschen Geographen).

The organizational meeting was preceded by a meeting of the old working-group. The members voted to dissolve the existing working-group and to request that the president of the German Cartographic Society approve this decision at the next board meeting. The following gentlemen became members: Dehmel, Eggers, Grebe, Gruessner, Kost, Lautensach, Meynen, Mueller, Muenchheimer, Schlenger, Siewke, and Stocks. Additional 4 slots were kept open for collaboration of the Austrians and the Swiss. The cooperation of experts as guests was also provided for. The discussions with Austria resulted in the participation in the work of Dr. Krallert and Prof. Strzygowski as representatives of Austrian scientific circles and as members of the board. The negotiations with the Swiss colleagues are still going on.

The members elected Prof. Meynen, until now president of the working-group, as president of the new Standing Committee. The Federal Office for Area Studies, now the Institute for Area Studies in the Federal Office for Area Studies and Space Research, was made the executive office of the Standing Committee, and Superior Government Counselor Hoffmann, who is in charge of the section "Spelling of Names" in the Institute for Area Studies, was elected secretary

of the Committee. According to the by-laws adopted by the Committee, the Standing Committee is an independent scientific body of experts which renders its opinions without majority decision and not subject to any instructions.

The ideas which Prof. Meynen presented in 1958 at the Munich International Congress for Name Research "for the Standardization of Geographic Names for the German Language Area and its Significance for the International Standardization of Geographic Names" (see Kartographische Nachrichten 1/1959, pages 1-6) were approved in principle by the Committee and considered as guides for further discussion. The Standing Committee also declared the completion of the "Geography Duden, Spelling of Geographic Names" to be a primary objective of its work.

The preliminary work of the former working-group was adopted in its totality and the manuscripts which were ready for print were put in final form. The Committee proceeds as follows: the executive office prepares for every meeting the lists of key words (Stichwortlisten) to be discussed; normally they are disposed of after 3 readings by being declared ready for print. Where the case requires it, experts for individual regions or language areas are consulted. It may be noted that the Committee is grateful for any support received.

The Geography "Duden" will first be published as a serial, in which the names, organized by countries, will be listed alphabetically. Each serial publication will contain a survey map. After completion of this serial publication, a comprehensive publication will be published, in which all names will be available in alphabetic order. This way, the need for a regional division of the material as well as for a quick orientation will be met for each and every individual case. The printing of the first part can be started in the spring of 1960. It will be to the lasting credit of the German Cartographic Society to have given the initiative towards this Geography "Duden."

The Geography Duden, of course, is only a part, a first task which the Standing Committee is pledged to undertake; in addition it exercises the function of an expert, first practiced in 1959 in two opinions rendered. The first expert opinion was rendered upon request by the Geography Service of the Foreign Office, in the matter of the list of names prepared by the states and presented by the Geographic Service. The problem was to examine the short designation, the official designation, and the adjective form in their German spelling, and to indicate the recommended form, whereby it had to be taken into consideration that the suggested spelling must be usable in official communication by the Federal Republic as well as by Austria and Switzerland. Therefore, the Committee undertook to discuss this question thoroughly with Austrian and Swiss representatives. It is obvious that the object could only be attained when all parties involved were ready to make compromises.

The second expert opinion rendered by the Committee concerned an opinion upon request by the Federal Ministry of the Interior concerning a verbal note by the secretary of the United Nations and attached program for international standardization of geographic terms (Draft Programme for Achieving International Uniformity in the Writing of Geographic Names). The position taken by the Standing Committee was formulated in writing by a special commission and, after a thorough discussion, was approved unanimously in the fifth meeting of the committee. It reads as follows:

Expert Opinion of the Standing Committee for the Spelling of Geographic Names, concerning the Draft Program (Draft Programme for achieving international uniformity in the writing of geographic names) of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (enclosure to the verbal note from the Secretary General of the United Nations, dated June 26, 1958).

I

1. The Standing Committee agrees in principle with the ideas laid down in the draft program for the achievement of international uniformity in the writing of geographic names. The Standing Committee, in view of the increasing interrelation of international traffic and of the strengthening of international understanding and cooperation, is convinced of the importance of such a uniformity in the writing of geographic names for international purposes. The Standing Committee considers it imperative for the German-speaking countries to actively participate in the task of standardizing the writing of geographic names.

2. The Standing Committee supports the establishment of a central clearing center with the United Nations with the task of exchanging the results obtained on a national or regional basis and promoting coordination. For that reason the Standing Committee is gratified by the decision of the second regional cartographic conference for Asia and the Far East of UNO in Tokyo (20 October to 1 November 1958) concerning the need for establishing an international committee for geographic names (International Committee on Geographic Names) with the United Nations.

3. The International Committee for Geographic Names should, as far as possible, rely on

- a) national institutions of an official, semi-official, or scientific character with similar tasks;
- b) regional (supra-national) scientific groups for common language regions.

4. The Standing Committee shares the opinion that, if possible, a national institution -- if not already existing -- should be organized to establish and maintain the official mode of writing of geographic names for the sovereign territory of the state in question.

The Standing Committee is of the opinion that in common language areas, from the beginning, regional boards should deal with new problems on a supra-national basis by way of discussion and should undertake to find practical solutions for them.

II

a) German cartographers and geographers have always held the opinion that a geographic name is part of the living language and that it is entirely natural and justified if the name of the same place sounds and is written differently in different languages. In that sense it must be the right of every country to make recommendations and give directives for the mode of writing of geographical names in the respective language area. This applies also to the mode of writing of conventional names beyond the limits of the own state. Such directives exist for official British usage, given by the PCGN, and for German use they are contained in the directive concerning the mode of writing of names of places and regions in German textual and map publications of 7 July 1952. (GMB1, p. 215)

b) A different matter is the task of standardization of the writing of geographic names for international purposes. It is obvious that in this matter other points must be considered. The task is here to work out directives acceptable by all states.

III

Principles for the standardization of the spelling of geographic names for international names.

Regarding the international standardization of the spelling of geographic names, the Standing Committee is of the opinion that

1. as a matter of principle, only one form of name can be considered for a geographical object;
2. for that purpose only the written and not the spoken form of the name is to be considered;
3. for the international determination of the mode of writing only the Latin alphabet can be used, as has also been expressed in the majority of opinions rendered by other states;
4. in the application of the Latin script the diacritical markings used by certain states employing Latin script must be accepted;
5. the official mode of writing in a state is to be recognized as the mode of writing to be used internationally for the geographic names of its sovereign territory. However, this should not prejudice any territorial claims under dispute;
6. in the case of a bilingual or multilingual state, two official forms of names of equal legal standing should be considered, if necessary (such as Helsinki/Helsingfors, or Bruxelles/Brussels);

7. in case of land or maritime areas which are not subject to any sovereignty, the writing of the names will require further determination. In this matter the Standing Committee supports the international custom to recognize with international validity the form of the name coined by the discoverer.

In international cartographic publications, names of areas not subject to state sovereignty and names of geographical objects extending across several states should always be given in the language of the state in which the cartographic piece is published, and in addition, if needed, in the English, French, and Spanish form, if these modes of writing vary considerably from that of the state in which the publication appears.

IV

1. If, in the case of countries using the Latin script, names using that script are accepted for international usage, no difficulties are encountered if the above-mentioned principles are followed -- except the names of certain areas which are politically disputed. The situation is different with respect to names of states not using the Latin script, because then the problem of transliteration and transcription arises.

2. Where a state not using the Latin script has already an officially designated key for transliteration and transcription into the Latin script (e.g., Iran), this form of writing should be used for the international standardization. The idea of the draft program that the states using one script should agree on a common key for transliteration and transcription should be supported.

3. In cases where countries with a non-Latin script do not yet have an officially determined or recognized key for transliteration and transcription into the Latin script, the Standing Committee recommends the preparation of preliminary directives by the International Committee for Geographic Names or the Secretariat of the United Nations.